

The project entitled **Turkey's policy towards Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in the light of standards of the European Union (EU)** was born as a result of wide-ranging research on Turkey's domestic and foreign policy that the author have carried out since year 2009. Multiple stays in Turkey began with the Student Exchange Erasmus Programme and then related to participation in UNESCO (Mapping the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Kars Province) and EU (Millennium Lovers on the stage in the city of Tunceli in South-East Turkey) cultural projects, traineeship in the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Istanbul as well as pre-master thesis research (**Political and legal-institutional aspects of Turkey's integration with the European Union and Kurdish nationalism and identity in Turkey**) resulted in a deep reflection on legal and real dimension of changes implemented into Turkish law within the framework of its adaptation to the EU norms and requirements. Official accession negotiations which was started in 2005 and preceding adjustment process spurred legal reforms theoretically supposed to improve the situation of minority groups (including both non-Turkic and non-Islamic communities) living in the territory of Turkey. However, preliminary research led the author to put forward a hypothesis that the reforms made on the legal ground have no reflection on actual conditions of existence of minorities because real improvement of their situation would collide with a political interest of Justice and Development Party being in power since 2002. The objective of the project is to verify this hypothesis and to indicate prospective issues in which legal changes implemented into Turkish law within the framework of negotiation process do not meet real needs of members of the minority communities.

To achieve the objective it is necessary to conduct a basic research including first of all a critical analysis of international documents and agreements which constitute frames of universal system and regional systems of minority rights protection and control mechanisms functioning within them which Turkey – as a signatory of most significant acts and a candidate country to the EU – is obliged to obey. Moreover, also the most important acts of Turkish law are being examined in their original language what helps to avoid inaccuracies often resulting from translations. Simultaneously, not only the letter of law but also the practical dimension of implemented reforms is subjected to analysis. Being aware of specificity of terms 'ethnic minority', 'national minority' and 'religious minority' resulting from universal system and regional systems of minority rights protection the author applies also the classification valid and used in Turkish law. The pillar of Turkey's policy towards minorities has been since the proclamation of the republic in 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne signed in the same year. According to adopted by the authorities of the new Turkish state interpretation of its article 39, legally sanctioned status of minority may be granted only to groups professing religion other than Islam. In practice, only Greeks, Armenians and Jews are being recognized as minorities and may benefit from resulting privileges. While Roman Catholics and Assyrians belonging to one of Eastern Christian churches remain in specific legal vacuum, minorities like Kurds, Arabs, Circassians or professing syncretic variants of Islam Alevis from a legal point of view do not even exist. In the light of Turkish law all of them are Turks and do not possess any tools of protection of own identity. As a result of indicated specificity of Turkish minority policy, communities that do not identify themselves with Turkish majority benefit from legal changes implemented within the framework of negotiation process only partially and in varying degrees, potentially not meeting their real needs.

In research, not only methods of legal-institutional analysis and decision analysis are used for the purpose of verifying the hypothesis put forward but also personal meetings with the representatives of minority organizations and religious communities take place. Language of interviews that are conducted during the meetings is Turkish what makes the probability of learning what the members of minorities really think about implemented reforms higher. Therefore, the result of basic research conducted within the project is to amass, extend and systematize knowledge about legal and real situation of Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey in the light of its European aspirations. This will particularly enable to take an attempt to foresee possible directions of changes in their position in case of successful completion of the accession process but also its failure – break or suspension of negotiations.

While a general inspiration to take an interest in this research subject matter were mainly studies conducted previously and observations made during multiple stays in Turkey, two many reasons for undertaking this particular project may be indicated. First was a deep conviction that legal status of minority communities and actual conditions of their existence strongly need to be examined and compared because various factors may suggest that reforms implemented within the framework of the adjustment process do not translate into practice. Second reason relates to widely spread, both on the scientific and journalistic ground, but incorrect conviction that the only one minority being a victim of an oppressive policy of Turkey are the Kurds. Decades-lasting armed struggle against Turkish state (including activity of the Worker's Party of Kurdistan) and aspirations to independence or at least some kind of self-governance resulted in identifying multidimensional minority issue in Turkey with the so-called Kurdish problem. However, in fact Turkish society is ethnically and religiously divided and the needs of particular groups may differ. What is common for all of them are the expectations related to the ongoing accession process which is perceived as a chance for change of minority policy based on the Treaty of Lausanne. Some kind of 'awakening' of minority communities other than Kurds that have been taking place since beginning of 21st century induce the author to ask a question about reasons of this phenomenon and EU's influence on their chance for emancipation. On the one hand the research will contribute to the discussion on EU's role in democratization processes in candidate countries and on the other hand will help to broaden the spectrum of perceptions of minority issue in Turkey and to depart from 'Kurdo-centric' perspective. While Kurds are undoubtedly the most significant minority with respect to size of this group there is no logical reason for not recognizing ethnic minorities like Arabs, Circassians, Laz people, Zaza people, Pomaks, Torbeš or Azeris and religious minorities like Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Assyrians, Roman Catholic or Alevis professing syncretic variants of Islam. The factor that for the first time since proclamation of the republic may impact ossified minority policy based on the Treaty of Lausanne are particularly ongoing accession negotiations.

Fluency in Turkish, deep knowledge about Turkey and habits and culture of each of minority groups positively impact the quality of basic research conducted within the project and thus, will help the author to achieve the scientific objectives.